

BELGIUM'S AMAZING PROGRESS

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Belgium's Amazing Progress

Belgium is busy. In the year and a half since the Germans retired from Belgium, greater progress has been made toward complete economic recovery than seemed possible in view of the destruction and pillage by the invaders. One-third of the Belgian factories were destroyed; more than 1,300 miles of standard gauge railway, and 1,400 bridges were rendered useless; and many thousands of machines were carried away to be used in Germany or Austria.

Now Belgium's factories are producing on an average about three-fourths as much as before the war; her railroads are operating 80% of the normal number of freight trains, and 60% of the normal number of passenger trains. The output of coal actually exceeds the rate of production in 1913. A continuation of the present relative growth of her export trade would give Belgium an excess of exports over imports before the end of this year.

Agriculture

Much of the success of the Belgians in their industrial and commercial recovery since the war is attributable to their highly developed agriculture. The land seriously devastated by the Germans amounted to only 70,000 acres, or less than 1% of the total area of Belgium. Special attention has been given to the encouragement of the production of foodstuffs, and in 1919 agricultural production in general surpassed the average in pre-war years. Normally, about three-fifths of the total area of the

country is under cultivation, and the value of the output per acre before the war was \$100, a yield unequalled in any other country.

Coal

Coal mines suffered less during the war than any other of the major Belgian industries. Generally speaking, they were kept in operation by the Germans right up to the Armistice. Machinery and accessories of the mines, however, depreciated from excessive use by the invaders. The Belgians have so far overcome these and other handicaps that in the first three months of this year the output of coal actually exceeded the pre-war production, representing in April 105% of the production in the corresponding month of 1913.

While the production of coal, a vital factor for a country of such intensive manufacturing, has hastened the industrial recuperation of Belgium, the lack of sufficient diversity in the coal hitherto produced has made it necessary to depend upon importation of soft varieties from other countries. The shortage of "long flame" coal is still retarding the resumption of full-time operation in a number of lines of industrial production.

This lack of balance in the varieties of Belgian coal promises to be overcome shortly. Just prior to the war extensive deposits of soft coal were discovered in the Limbourg district and their exploitation was begun. Mining activity in this region has been resumed and it is expected not only that Belgian industries will be adequately supplied with bituminous coal, but that a surplus will be available for export.

Iron and Steel

Belgian metallurgical industries suffered more at the hands of the Germans than did any other. The destruction and pillage was intended to eliminate for a long time the competition of these industries in the world's markets. In 1913, Belgium produced 2,500,000 long tons of steel, about 80% of which in various forms was exported. Belgian high grade steels are famous throughout the world. The steel industry prospered greatly in the decade before the war; the output, in fact, increased 150% during that period.

Blast furnaces that were destroyed by the Germans have been rebuilt, more than half of the machinery that was removed has been recovered, and the steel mills are producing about 40% of their pre-war output. If sufficient coke were available to operate all the plants at capacity, the production would be between 50% and 60% of normal.

The Belgian zinc industry—which before the war supplied more than a fifth of the world's output of unmanufactured zinc, and three-fourths of whose production was exported—was almost completely destroyed during the German occupation. The industry has now so far recovered that in March the output was 66% of normal pre-war production. Only the lack of raw material is preventing complete resumption. A contract was recently made for 240,000 tons of Australian zinc ore, which should bring material relief to this industry.

Textiles

The textile industries were not so systematically damaged as the metallurgical group, although cop-

per and brass parts, belting, etc., were carried away. The spinning and weaving mills are now producing about 80% of their normal output. At the beginning of the current year, 1,360,000 cotton spindles were in operation, representing about 86% of the total spindles in operation in 1913. The resumption of production at the full pre-war rate is mainly dependent upon obtaining the raw material. Woolen mills are operating at capacity rates.

Before the war, Belgian flax spindles numbered 330,000; there are now utilizable 311,000, with 103,000 in actual operation. In this division of industry also the chief difficulty is the shortage of raw material. Although the Belgian flax fields are practically as extensive as before the war, the production is insufficient to offset the lack of Russian flax.

Glass

The production of glass has long been important in the maintenance of Belgian export trade; in 1913, the Belgian factories produced about 3,000,000 square yards of plate, and 48,000,000 square yards of window glass. About 90% of the Belgian product before the war was exported.

One of the eight large plate glass factories was destroyed. The others are in operation. All of the window glass plants are in full or partial operation. Again owing to shortage of raw material, production is restricted to about 60% of normal.

Railways

At the outbreak of the war, Belgium had a greater railway mileage in proportion to area than any other country. Besides the more than 2,500 miles of

state-owned standard gauge lines, there was an almost equal mileage of light meter-gauge roads traversing the farming regions and serving as feeders to the standard gauge lines.

The Germans destroyed more than 1,300 miles of the standard gauge track and 1,400 bridges. By January 1, 1920, all except 15 miles of the destroyed trackage was restored, and permanent or temporary structures had replaced the destroyed bridges.

Through reclaiming and repairing the stolen railway equipment the depleted Belgian stock of locomotives and cars has been greatly augmented. In January, 1919, Belgium had 578 locomotives, of which only 279 were in running condition; in March, 1920, she had 4,220, of which 60%, or nine times as many as in January, 1919, were in condition for use. Orders have been placed for 550 additional new locomotives.

The rate of resumption of traffic movement, is indicated by the following figures of car and tonnage movement in 1919 and the first quarter of 1920:

1919

1st quarter—cars moved per day,	11,000
freight moved per day,	146,051 tons
2nd quarter—cars moved per day,	21,244
freight moved per day,	291,478 tons
3rd quarter—cars moved per day,	35,063
freight moved per day,	470,266 tons
4th quarter—cars moved per day,	40,425
freight moved per day,	542,844 tons

1920

1st quarter—cars moved per day,	60,000
freight moved per day,	700,000 tons

About 60% of the pre-war passenger traffic and 80% of the freight traffic have been resumed.

Ports

Antwerp, through which passed about 85% of Belgium's sea-borne commerce before the war, and which was second only to Hamburg among Continental ports, is the natural gateway of commerce of a large part of western and central Europe, including Luxembourg, northern and eastern France, southern Germany, Switzerland, and extending even into Austria and Italy. The port's communication with the interior is maintained by the nearly 1,250 miles of Belgian canals and natural waterways and the excellent railway system.

Recent months have shown marked increase in the activity of the port. In 1913, the tonnage entering Antwerp was 14,146,819 tons. In 1919, the total was 5,300,876; the number of ships in December was 456 with an aggregate tonnage of 636,848, as compared with 95 ships and 164,333 tons in January. By months the figures for ships and tonnage in the first quarter of this year are as follows:

	<i>Ships</i>	<i>Tonnage</i>
January	570	715,704
February	613	698,256
March	691	838,257

Projected works, some of which are in course of construction, would double the capacity of the port, which is already capable of handling 30,000,000 tons of commerce annually.

The trade of the other Belgian ports shows gratifying growth also. Ghent especially is displaying marked activity. In January, 1920, alone there was imported into Ghent, which is the chief center of the Belgian cotton spinning industry, more than

three times as much cotton as was worked up in that district in the whole of 1913. Extensive improvements are projected for enlarging the facilities of the port.

Trade

During the last year, the Belgians have made large purchases of machinery and raw materials for the restoration of their industries. The imports in 1919 totaled 5,075,000,000 francs, and the exports, 2,296,000,000 francs. For the first two months of 1920 exports amounted to 1,041,000,000 francs, or almost half as much as for the entire year 1919. Imports for these two months were valued at 1,726,000,000 francs.

Belgium now has a favorable balance of trade with France, Holland, Germany and other countries. Only with countries from which food and raw materials are being purchased largely, such as the United States, Canada, and Argentina, is the balance heavily against Belgium.

Now, as before the war, Belgium ranks fifth among the nations as a market for United States exports. In the total of Belgian imports in the first two months of 1920, trade with the United States ranked second, being slightly exceeded by imports from the United Kingdom.

Congo

The Belgian Congo has an area about one-third that of the United States. Belgium has received a mandate over the adjacent northwestern portion of what was formerly German East Africa.

The Congo is rich in a great variety of natural

resources. The Katanga region contains one of the richest copper deposits in the world. Other mineral deposits include tin, iron, and coal; already considerable gold and about one-tenth of the world's diamond output are produced in the Congo. Cotton of a good quality is grown in the Congo, and it is expected that within a few years an important part of the raw material for Belgium's textile mills will be drawn from this colony.

The principal exports are palm kernels, palm oil, copal, rubber, coffee, ivory, gold, diamonds and copper. Last year 40,000 tons of palm oil, 23,000 tons of copper, gold to the value of 90,000,000 francs, and diamonds valued at 100,000,000 francs were exported.

The Congo has 1,300 miles of railways and 9,400 miles of navigable waterways. With four lines of communication from the interior of the colony to the east, south and west coasts of Africa, and additional railways under construction, the Congo is ripe for further development. This development would afford additional markets for Belgian manufactures and new supplies of raw materials for Belgian industries.

